

Call It Fate by EvieSmallwood

Series: [the tales of short stack and string bean \[16\]](#)

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: F/M, Fluffy Times, Rain, el is so done with his shit, lots of flirting, michael “hearteyes” wheeler, mike is a dweeb, sweaters and softness, they’re so in love wow i can’t believe it

Language: English

Characters: Dustin Henderson, Eleven, Lucas Sinclair, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Mike Wheeler, Will Byers

Relationships: Eleven/Mike Wheeler

Status: Completed

Published: 2018-04-22

Updated: 2018-04-22

Packaged: 2022-04-22 04:40:41

Rating: Teen And Up Audiences

Warnings: No Archive Warnings Apply

Chapters: 1

Words: 9,743

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

They’ve been headed here for a long time.

Call It Fate

Author's Note:

- For .

I'm sorry this took me, like, a month (or longer?) to write! I just got so swamped with the end of the school year and also! this was so hard to write for some reason! But here it is :)

Foreword:

With a clap of thunder and a lightning bolt to his heart, there she is; soaked and shivering, glowing. Rain drips from her jawline. She's so bright, so *yellow*—but her eyes; hazel and golden, unearthly in some way he doesn't yet understand—they're *terrified*. He feels a thump in his chest, a clicking, and knows something.

This is certain, she is certain, whoever and whatever she is.

The beams from their flashlights illuminate her face and years later he will understand that (*she is his sun*) though she can be loud and destructive and positively drowning, she is not his storm; she is what pulls him from it, what makes him alive. She is his fresh air and blue skies and green grass. She is spring personified, a mirror of summer.

"Are you okay?"

They're the first words out of his mouth and they tumble. They're necessary. He's tripping over himself to get a little closer to her and she flinches away. It's okay, though. Some part of him, deep and buried all this time, understands. She isn't okay.

"Are you cold?"

Of course she is. How could she not be? And with this realisation comes a self sacrifice that not five minutes ago he would have laughed at, had it been suggested. Mike peels off his coat and drapes it over her shoulders, relieved when she only jumps at the movement but doesn't scurry back. He takes away her fear and doesn't lessen

her light, her *glowing*, because he's pretty sure that comes from inside her.

She has drawn him into her gravitational force and, though he's unaware just yet, he's more than happy to complete this orbit; year after year, day after day. Whatever and however long it takes.

And though this moment is magnifying and electrifying and the beginning of something, it's still just the beginning.

-one-

May, 1985

The leaves crunch lightly beneath his shoes, still wet from that morning's rainfall. The air is thick with a misty haze, clinging to his skin. His face is almost numb, but thankfully the cabin isn't far off.

Mike knows the way by heart, now; after worming the directions out of Nancy, he's come here as often as possible over the last six months.

A part of him can't believe it's been that long. It seems like just yesterday she was walking through the Byers front door, head lowered and eyes rimmed with shadow.

Bitchin'.

He fiddles with the chain in his pocket, thinking. Over the last half a year, she's only become more of a fixture in his life. The cabin is sort of his safe place, and she's...

She's kind of the main reason he gets up in the morning.

(gets up, and endures the thick silence of the breakfast table, broken only when his dad turns a page from his newspaper or his mom asks some probing question no one wants to answer)

Mike takes a deep breath before ascending the rickety steps up to the cabin porch. He doesn't even have to use the knock they've all memorised; the door is thrown open before he can even raise his fist.

El stands on the other side, practically drowning in a too-big sweater.

Her hair, which has gotten progressively longer, is pulled back into two haphazard braids. She's beautiful.

"Hi," she steps a little closer.

Mike smiles. "Hi, shortstack."

El grabs his arm and pulls him inside without another word. Mike practically stumbles over the threshold.

"Happy birthday," he says, once she's dragged him all the way to her room.

It was yesterday, and he hadn't been able to come. He'll probably feel like shit about it for the rest of his damn life.

But he's here now, and she's smiling. "Thank you, Stringy."

Mike kicks off his shoes and peels his raincoat from his shoulders. Then he drops down beside her on her bed, before pulling her into his arms. "Better."

"Mike," El squirms against him. "You're all wet."

"Am not."

"Are too!"

Mike rubs his wet hair against her face. "Am not!"

"Are too," she giggles, and then, "D-2."

He looks down at her, all slack jawed and full of awe. "Has anyone ever told you that you're the most perfect girlfriend ever?"

El wraps her arms around his neck and grins. "Yeah, you. Lots of times."

He doesn't waste a second, leaning down and peppering her face with kisses, amidst muttered proclamations of '*you're perfect*'.

El giggles. "You're like a dog."

"A loyal dog, right?" Mike kisses her for real this time; chaste but soft. "One you care about, like, a lot?"

"You even smell like one," she adds.

He scoops her up and hugs her close again, ignoring her squealed protests. "Now you do, too, so *ha ha*."

"You're mean," she says, frowning.

"So are you," Mike pokes her side. "That's my sweater, you thief."

It really is; some old blue thing his grandmother knitted for him when he was like eleven. She'd totally overestimated his height, to the point where it still doesn't fit him.

El folds her arms over her chest. "What makes you say that?"

"I'm wearing it in like three family photos," Mike smirks. "You totally stole it."

"I didn't steal it," El protests, "I borrowed it."

"There's a difference?"

"Yes. I was gonna give it back."

He quirks an eyebrow. "But you're not anymore?"

She cocks her head to the side. The curls framing her face are frizzy from the humidity, and lighter than the rest. Her eyes are dark, focused on his own. He can hardly breathe.

"I don't think I will," she decides. "It smells like you."

"I smell like me."

El rolls her eyes. "It smells like good you," she argues, burrowing against him. "Not gross you."

Mike shifts, nudging her nose with his own. "What does good me smell like?"

“Like cinnamon,” El replies, wrapping her arms around his waist in a way that sends shivers down his spine, because her fingers are just gracing his skin. “And detergent. And cookies, if I’m lucky.”

Mike frowns. “God, I smell like a girl.”

“You smell pretty,” she corrects. “I love it.”

Love. There’s that word again. It keeps popping up, more and more. I love your eyes, I love your smile, I love your laugh.

He loves her. He really, really does. He loves her so much sometimes it actually hurts—when they’re apart or together. It’s an ever-present ache in the pit of his stomach. A yearning for her; to be closer even if they’re as close as this.

Mike kisses her. It’s different from all of their others in some indescribable way. He thinks maybe it has to do with the way she keeps pulling him toward her, even though he’s not going anywhere (ever). She seems desperate—almost as much as he is.

Then the kiss deepens, and it’s like, the most awesome thing ever. Her lips part against his own, hands moving to cup his cheeks before threading through his hair.

They’re making out. They’re like, actually making out. It’s amazing. His heart is probably about to beat out of his chest, but it’s so good.

This is what more is like; her warm lips and her overpowering vanilla scent and her, El Hopper, making out with him.

Mike draws back for air and she gasps. Like, really gasps. The next thing he knows, they’re back at it again. El grabs a fistful of his hair, and fuck, it feels good.

His own hand goes from her hip to the nape of her neck. He gently tugs her braids free, letting his fingers run through her soft, lemon-smelling curls.

El flips him onto his back. She leans over his side, cheeks flushed and lips swollen. Holy fucking shit, he did that.

“Isn’t there some sort of rule about this? No funny business?”

El cups his cheek. “What’s funny business?”

He presses his lips to hers. “That.” Then to her cheek, and her jaw. “That, too.”

When the hell do they stop? When her mouth presses against the side of his neck, gentle and heated? When she pulls back, curious, a little worried at the way he’s breathing (not, he’s not breathing).

When he returns the favour?

El sighs. It’s some contented sound, and it leads to some far off forbidden territory. There’s a line and he doesn’t want to cross it (but god, would it really be so bad if he kissed her here just a few more times?).

The answer is no, definitely not. It’s actually totally amazing.

But then it’s his ear, and holy fucking shit. “El...”

“Mmhmm?”

“El, stop.”

The effect is immediate. She pulls back, face wrought with concern. “Are you okay?”

“We have to stop.” He grabs her hands in his own, trying to steady the racing of his heart. “Please?”

“Okay,” El tugs her lower lip between her teeth, reluctantly putting a bit of space between them.

“You don’t have to go to Mars,” Mike complains. “I just... I don’t want to go too far, you know?”

“How far is too far?”

“I don’t know,” he admits, because he really doesn’t.

“Max said you shouldn’t go to second base before freshman year,” El

says. "She says people think you're slutty."

"Well, we didn't."

"I know," El whacks his shoulder. "It's stupid that people made baseball analogies for kissing."

"You think?"

"Don't you?"

"I never really thought about it," Mike shrugs, before grinning. "Why did you?"

El shoves him, this time. "Shut up. You're gross."

"You're pretty," he retorts.

"Just pretty?"

Mike coils one of her curls around a finger. "Beautiful."

El takes his hand, studying his palm for a few seconds before she presses her lips to it. She does the same to his knuckles. Mike's cheeks feel hot, but he doesn't stop her. There's something... intimate about it. Maybe even more so than what they were just doing.

"Jenny and Greg got married on All My Children," El tells him suddenly.

Mike settles back against the pillows. "Yeah?"

El nods. "She had flowers in her hair. Hop said it was... extravagant."

He's never really been interested in soaps. His mom is; really, they're like, all she watches. He makes some half interested noise, though, too focused on the way her eyelashes stand out against her cheeks from this angle.

El looks up at him, all inquiring and hopeful.

"We'll get married someday, right?"

Mike doesn't miss a beat. "Well, yeah—but when we're like, older, y'know?"

El hums. "I'm gonna wear flowers in my hair."

She rests her head on his chest. They stay like that, even after it starts to rain again. The pitter-patter of the droplets against the drains is so calming he almost falls asleep.

Then he remembers, oh yeah, there was a reason I came here.

"Hey, I got you something."

El's interest is peaked immediately. She sits up with him. "What?"

"I wanted it to be nice," Mike says, nervously pulling the necklace from his pocket. "I've been saving up."

Saving up, sure. And doing whatever odd jobs he can find; mowing lawns, washing cars, walking dogs.

The result is the silver locket he holds out to her.

El's eyes widen. "For me?"

"Anything for you, shortstack."

She grins. "Mike..."

"I know it's late, and all, but I just thought..." Mike shrugs, undoing the clasp to put it around her neck. "Happy Birthday, El."

She throws her arms around him. "I'm gonna wear this, too."

Mike frowns. "When?"

"When we get married, doof," she kisses his cheek. "I'll never take it off, I promise."

"Okay," Mike grins, *when they get married*. "Promise."

-two-

June, 1985

“What’s camping?”

“It’s a surprise,” Mike repeats, after she asks him for the millionth time. He’s loading up his backpack, which he’d helped her do with her own just before. “You’ll like it, I promise.”

El rolls her eyes, continuing to pace back and forth across the wooden floorboards in her room, hearing them creak and shift whenever she turns. Mike still doesn’t look up from his task; he’s totally absorbed, hunched over on her bed and sorting through his clothes.

“Mike.”

“Hmm?”

El sighs. Mike gets like this all the time; when they’re studying together, or watching one of his favourite shows. He gets so swept up, he forgets she’s even there—and that really won’t do.

She clambers up onto her bed. His head is half buried in his bag, so he hardly notices. El touches his knee. “Mike.”

“Uh... yeah?”

He’s still not looking. El waves a hand in front of his face before poking his cheek. Mike blinks, face breaking out into a grin. It’s her favorite smile, the best one she’s ever seen. She feels her heart start to race at the sight.

“What are you doing?” He asks, amused (like he thinks it’s funny, like *she’s* funny).

“What are you doing?” El scoots closer. “What are *we* doing?”

There’s only inches of space separating them, now. Something hovers in the air between them; something warm and electric. It’s almost... tangible (able to be touched, to be grasped).

“I’m packing,” Mike says.

"Mike," El pokes his cheek again, which only makes him smile bigger—and that makes her stomach flip. He's so pretty, with the sun shining through her parted curtains. It makes the ends of his hair lighten, like the girls on television. Hopper had called that softglow. "What's camping?"

"Camping," Mike takes her hand, leaning closer—and she's certain she's finally broken him down—"is a surprise."

El groans, falling back against the mattress. It's just not fair. He always explains when she doesn't understand.

Mike leans over her. "Problem?"

"You're mean."

"I am not," he protests. "Everyone agreed that we wouldn't tell you, okay? I'm just keeping my promise."

"That's good," she says, "unless I *want* you to break it."

Mike laughs when she tugs him down, so that he has to prop himself up on one arm to hover over her. Their noses brush. El feels that thrumming, again—only this time, it's deep in her belly, coursing all through her veins.

She leans forward and brushes his lips with hers, relishing in the surprised way he sucks in air—gasping. El lays one of her hands against his warm cheek. His curls brush her fingertips. *Soft.*

"Tell me."

Mike's eyes are so heavy, so dark, it's like they hold the answer to every question in the universe. Maybe they do. He kisses her; slow and sweet, a little longer than what she's used to.

"No."

"Mike!" El shoves him off of her, but he's laughing anyway. "That's not fair!"

Her stupid boyfriend beams at her, still chuckling. "It is too."

“Is not.”

“Is too.”

“Not!”

“Too!”

El tackles him. Mike grunts in surprise, though it quickly fades away into uncontrollable laughter as she tickles his sides and his arms. “Stop!”

“Not until you explain.”

“I won’t,” he wriggles out from her grip easily, panting, cheeks flushed. Beautiful. “I told the guys I wouldn’t, okay?”

El purses her lips. She knows ‘the guys’ includes Max, who’s her best friend. Best friends are supposed to tell each other everything, aren’t they? Boyfriends too.

“Fine,” El folds her arms over her chest, glaring at him. “Then I won’t go.”

“What?”

“If I don’t understand, I don’t do it.”

His face falls. It almost crumbles her resolve. Mike bites his lip, seemingly thinking, before he pulls her into his arms. “Please come? I promise it’s no big deal. We’ll explain everything as we go, okay?”

El doesn’t look at him, even though butterflies have exploded in her stomach at his touch, and all she wants to do is melt against him.

“Shortstack?”

That isn’t fair. At all. Maybe he doesn’t know it, but that nickname is her favorite thing on the whole planet. It’s her favorite word ever. With the way he’s holding her and how quietly he’s speaking (pleading), she really can’t help it when she caves.

El picks at the hem of her sweater, pink thread between her fingers, and sighs. "Fine."

"Yes!" Mike pulls her even closer, peppering her cheeks and forehead with kisses. It's the most amazing thing ever. "I promise it'll be fun. And if it's not, we can come back here and do something else, instead."

El huffs. "Okay."

She allows him two seconds of victory before flipping him onto his back and tickling him again.

Camping, as it turns out, involves a lot of supplies and a *lot* of walking.

They start out at about noon and hike through the woods for maybe thirty minutes, maybe forty—all six of them, bickering the whole time—before finally settling upon a spot.

The ground is littered with fresh, dewy mulch and green pine needles. Dustin stops, kicking over a hollowed out log. "Alright, this looks good."

Lucas frowns. "Don't you think we should stop somewhere less... wet?"

"What, like your mom's panties?"

"Gross, man!" Lucas shoves him. El really doesn't get the joke, but she knows they're acting like idiots, so she rolls her eyes.

"Guys, can we all agree to not be disgusting for the next twenty four hours?" Will pleads.

"Exactly," Dustin nods. "Don't be disgusting, Lucas. We're here for fresh air, and scary stories, and s'mores, okay?"

"Every story is scary if you're in it," Lucas grumbles.

“Hey, uncalled for!”

“So was!”

They shove each other some more, and then they're on the ground wrestling. Mike and Max move forward to get them off each other, but then they're both laughing.

“Dumbass,” Lucas punches his shoulder.

“Jackwad,” Dustin throws back, grinning toothily.

“Oh my god,” Max shakes her head. “So are we setting up here, or what?”

That's how it begins. El is instructed to sit on a nearby stump and watch, since she has no idea what she's doing. They don't either, though, given at least an hour goes by and they still haven't put up the tent, yet.

“Where does this pole go?”

“Up your ass.”

“Ha ha, very funny.”

Mike squints down at the instructions. “You stick it in the lining,” he tells Dustin.

They get it done a little while after that. The six of them study the little orange tent. It looks a little like her fort, El thinks.

“This is so not gonna fit all of us,” Max proclaims.

“Some of us can sleep outside,” Will suggests. “No big deal.”

“There is no way I'm sleeping outside with all of those mosquitoes,” Max says.

Dustin claps his hands together. “Okay, well, who draws the short straw, then?”

El doesn't know what short straw means, but Mike speaks up before

she can even ask. "It's like, when you do something no one wants to do," he murmurs. And then, to everyone else, "We'll do it."

Dustin raises his eyebrow. "Are you sure you two crazy kids can keep your hands off each other?"

"Shut up," Mike nudges him.

El seriously doesn't understand why they always make a big deal out of her and Mike; when they're alone together, when they hold hands, even when they just look at each other. It makes doing those things so much more... awkward.

At least, for him. El doesn't really care.

The rest of them start gathering supplies for a fire, singing *Dancing in the Dark* with horrible pitch. El pulls Mike aside.

"Why us?"

"I wanna show you some stuff," Mike says. "Don't worry about it."

El tries not to. She goes along with everyone as they sit around the fire, talking after dark. Smoke drifts upward in grey curls. Embers pop, emitting sparks that fly. Staring for too long at the flames makes her feel tired.

"And then he sliced his hand off!"

Max lunges at Lucas as she finishes her story, causing him to yelp in surprise. She laughs. "You're such a baby, stalker."

"That story wasn't even scary," Dustin says. He grabs a flashlight. "Heed the master."

Dustin's story, as it turns out, isn't scary either. No one's really is. Nothing compares to what they've really seen, but none of them care to bring it up.

"This is lame," Mike announces after a while. Whenever he speaks, she can feel his chest vibrate against her back. It makes her shiver, and she really hopes he doesn't notice. "Let's do something else."

“Like what?”

“S’mores!” Dustin throws his fist up, lunging for a bag of marshmallows.

“S’more?” El asks. “More what?”

“Oh my god,” Dustin grins. “Just you wait, El.”

S’mores end up being her absolute favorite food—more because of Mike’s arms around her as she tries them, his laughter at her pleased face. El plants a sticky kiss to his cheek.

It’s late, El knows that. She just doesn’t know the exact time.

They’ve been talking and laughing for hours, watching the fire slowly die away. Soon it’s just down to a pile of ash, prompting them all to sleep.

Max, Will, Lucas, and Dustin take the tent as planned. Mike and El find a drier place outside. He unrolls their sleeping bags. El watches him work with the ties and zippers; long, nimble fingers fiddling and adjusting, the bones in his hands flexing.

“Okay,” he announces.

El immediately burrows into her bag, grateful for the warmth. “Thanks.”

“No problem,” Mike slips into his. They’re quiet for a moment, listening to Dustin and Max argue about who should sleep where, because no one wants to smell your farts, Dustin.

Mike rolls onto his side so that he’s facing her. El matches him, resting her head against her arm. “So this is camping?”

“Yeah,” Mike nods. “Kind of underwhelming, I guess. It was Dustin’s stupid idea to keep it a secret.”

“I had fun,” El says. She takes one of his hands, lacing her fingers through his. She loves the way they look, like that. Hers are just a

little more tanned, so they stand out starkly. El runs her thumb over his. “Did you?”

“Yeah,” he sounds a little breathless. El meets his eyes, catching the way they glint in the dim silver-toned light. “I’m glad you could come.”

I’m glad you’re home.

“Me too.”

Me too.

El drags herself closer, burrowing against him, because he’s her home. Even out here in the middle of the woods, with no bearings and no Hopper and no bed, she feels perfectly safe. Mike is warm and soft and smells like cinnamon. She wraps her arms around him, tucking her head under his jaw, and decides that this is how she wants to fall asleep every night for the rest of her life.

The sound of their friends tapers off, leaving them with just the chirping of crickets. El taps Mike’s shoulder, pulling back. “What did you want to show me?”

“Oh,” he blinks blearily. “Okay, get on your back.”

She does. Above her, the sky is a wide expanse of indigo, dotted with thousands and thousands of stars. It always takes her breath away.

“See that constellation over there? That’s Orion’s Belt. Actually, it’s an asterism—which is like, three stars in a constellation. That whole thing is Orion. In Greek mythology, he was this hunter, so it kind of looks like a guy with a bow, y’know? And there’s his belt.”

El tilts her head. She sort of sees it. “Where’s his head?”

Mike grins. “Don’t ask me.”

“What else?”

“That one all the way over there is the Big Dipper. That’s what everyone calls it, anyway, because it looks like a spoon, see? It’s

actually called Ursa Major—and that one up there is Ursa Minor; the Little Dipper.”

Those ones are easier to see. El hums, laying her head against his chest. Mike shifts, prompting her to look at him. “Constellations are super, super old. But they’re gonna be here, like, way after we’re gone. All these things happen, and it’s just a blink. It’s kind of not fair, you know? Sometimes I wish I could live forever.”

He sounds so much smaller than normal when he says it. El brushes her fingers over his nose, touching the freckles. “I think we do,” she says. “I think I’ve met you before. I think I’ll keep meeting you over and over, until all the stars die.”

It’s something she understands. Something she knows, deep in her bones.

Until all the stars die, they’ll be together.

Because he’s her universe; all-encompassing, mesmerising, gravitating. He sucks her in with the stars on his cheeks and the pale moonlight of his skin. He holds her with his warm welcoming arms and matches the beat of his heart to hers, somehow, like magic. He makes her whole. He’s the light that matches her own, the lunar satellite to her solar, and they’ll circle one another on an axis of need and want and love until the day the sky falls apart.

But for now, they’ll just lay here, with their gazes locked together. Mike bites his lip. There’s something about the way he’s looking at her. It’s like she’s everything.

“Promise?”

El nudges his nose with her own. “I promise, Stringy.”

A promise is something you can never break.

Mike grins—only it falters, because something lands on his cheek; a raindrop. They both freeze, looking up again. One hits El’s forehead, and her hand, then then the next thing she knows the skies have

opened up and unleashed their wrath in the form of a heavy downpour.

“Shit,” Mike hisses, as they scramble out of their bags. “Shit, fuck, shit—”

From the tent, there’s laughter. “Let us in!” Mike practically yells. They’re both soaked, both shivering.

“What’s the password?”

“Dustin!” El pleads, smacking the canvas surface.

“Sorry, nope.”

Mike kicks it. “Asshole!”

“Not it either.”

“Alright, jerks, let them in,” Max’s voice pipes up, and suddenly the opening is being unzipped. El and Mike practically dive in—and it really is cramped with the six of them, but it’s also a quick way to warm up.

Her teeth stop chattering within minutes; nestled between Mike and Max, with his head on her shoulder and his arm around her stomach.

Perfect.

-interlude i-

When she asks him, he’s almost sure the moment can’t be real. It can’t be real, even though he can feel her hand in his, even though his heart pounds against his sternum.

It can’t be, but it is.

When she asks him, Mike almost barely hears; all of their friends are talking or yelling over one another, and her voice is so low as she leans a little closer, like this is just for them, even though they’re totally surrounded. Like she couldn’t hold it in.

When she asks him, Mike stops breathing. Just for a second. For a second, he's snapped back, he's a twelve year old kid and he's soaked to the bone, holding his hand out for some terrified girl to take; he's watching her quiver with uncertainty, eyes never leaving his face. He's making a decision. *I'll protect you.*

And now, here she is; those same eyes, earnest and expectant. Beautifully brown, as familiar as the back of his hand. Her lips are quirked upward, sort of teasing.

He can't help but think, in this millisecond where his heart beats and Dustin drops the handful of die that he's holding (muttering feverishly, *natural 20, natural 20, c'mon, baby...*) that maybe if they'd gone east instead of west that night when they'd been searching for Will, their paths never would have crossed. He thinks about the odds of that; of them going that direction and her running when she had, and how lucky he was. He's so, unbelievably lucky that El Hopper—Eleven—found him in the rain. He's so lucky she decided to trust him.

Another heartbeat. The die clatter on the ground.

She's never been perfect. She started out different, an anomaly that was made into a machine, categorized by the numbers on her arm. She wasn't a *person*, she was a thing. He hates more than anything that she didn't grow up the way he did (even if it really wasn't perfect either). He hates that she didn't watch Sunday morning cartoons with him and the guys, and that she didn't know what a popsicle was until she was thirteen.

011. But that means three in binary. Her favorite cartoon is *Bugs Bunny*. She hates grape popsicles because they taste like medicine. She's a person; she's his *favorite* person. She's kind of the most perfect girl in the whole fucking universe.

So he doesn't really have to think about what he's going to say, he just needs to regain the ability to speak.

On second thought, he really can't wait that long.

Anything for you, Shortstack.

El smiles—everyone is cheering, but they're gathering around Dustin, slapping his back—and it's absolutely the most beautiful thing he's ever seen. It's like he handed her the fucking sun. Mike is utterly transfixed by the light in her eyes; it's all he can do not to pull her into his arms and—

"Mike, man, can you stop making moony eyes at your girlfriend?! I just got a natural 20!"

Just for us.

-three-

November 1986

"So can I come over?"

Mike looks down at all the scattered mess on his bed; notes written on loose-leaf paper, textbooks and pencils, not to mention the binder full of assignments on his floor; all of which are due on Monday, two days from now.

His gaze flits from his things to the window, which is mostly obscured by the continuously falling rain. It rushes down in a sort of miniature waterfall, rippling and distorting the houses and streets.

"Maybe not."

There's a sound on the other end of the phone—a discontented sigh. "Why?"

Under normal circumstances, it'd be the best time for her to come; no one else is gonna be home for hours. But also, if he wants to pass any of his classes, he needs to get this stuff done.

"I'm just busy," Mike says, falling back against his pillows. He glares at the notebook in his lap. "Maybe tomorrow?"

"Yeah, maybe..."

El sounds doubtful. He can just picture her, sitting cross-legged in bed and playing with the coiled wire of her phone. Normally, they'd use their supercoms—but even with her powers, the storm has totally been screwing with the reception.

“Okay, how about I promise,” Mike suggests. “We’ll hang out tomorrow, and we’ll do something fun.”

“In the rain?”

“I’d hang out with you in the middle of a monsoon,” he says.

El laughs. “Really?”

“A hurricane,” he adds. “A tornado, an apocalypse—”

“Alright, I get it.” Her voice sounds tinny through the phone, but the amusement is still clear. He can’t help but smile. “Do your homework, nerd.”

“I’m *not* a nerd.”

“You are a little,” she says. “But it’s cute.”

“Cute, huh? So I’d be like, hot if I showed up in suspenders and those dorky glasses?”

El laughs again. It’s by far the most amazing sound ever. “I said nerdy, not dweeby.”

“What’s the difference?”

“You’re right, you’d look good in suspenders, anyway.”

Mike wrinkles his nose, even if his cheeks are flaming. She can make him blush from across town, and she probably knows it, too. He’ll never get used to this whole psychic link.

“What if I threw in a bow tie?”

“Better.”

It’s his turn to laugh. “You really go for that stuff, huh?”

There's a pause. "Go for?"

"Like, you like it," he says, cringing at his awful phrasing. He's totally lost touch with his ability to coherently explain anything, but luckily she doesn't need it so much anymore. The television, studying, being at school... she's more and more normal everyday.

Even though she'll never be completely normal. She'll always be more, and he's fine with that. He likes her just how she is; totally badass.

"I like you," she says suddenly. "I'd like you in anything."

Warmth surges through him. Mike bites his lip, but the grin breaks through anyway. "Yeah?"

"Definitely."

"What about one of those jogging suits and a sweatband?"

"Mike!"

At about noon, he's finished at least half of his homework. There's a stack of completed worksheets and chapter notes beside him, probably messier than his teachers will care for (but if they wanted neat handwriting they should've given a lighter workload, he thinks bitterly).

Mike closes his geometry textbook and slips off his mattress, trudging down the stairs amidst the cold air of the house. He can feel the chill even through his sweater.

He fiddles with the thermostat for a minute before going over to the fridge and rummaging through it. There's not much, and he's not even hungry; he just wants an excuse to not do his homework.

That's when he hears a thud.

After all of the bullshit they've gone through, his first thought isn't one of ease. All of the hairs on the back of his neck rise.

It can't be any of his friends; they're all just as overloaded with homework as him and don't have time to stop by. Nancy wouldn't come in that way, neither would his mom, and they're not supposed to be back until four anyways.

Mike slowly edges around the kitchen island, headed toward the basement from which continuous rummaging sounds.

He feels a little dramatic when he grabs a baseball bat from the closet, but he doesn't like the idea of going down there totally defenseless. Not after everything.

The steps creak as he slowly creeps further into the darkened basement, re-adjusting his grip on the bat with sweating palms.

And then, halfway down, the light flicks on. Mike jumps, swirling around toward the washing machine.

El grins. "Trying out for baseball?"

Relief floods through him—and mild irritation, but also she looks so pretty today so who cares? Mike lets the bat fall, rolling his eyes. "You scared the shit out of me."

"I was just putting my sweater in the dryer," she says. "It got wet."

That's when he remembers that *oh yeah, it's fucking pouring out*. Her curls are dripping and her face still looks damp. She's standing there in just a thick white tank top, shivering.

Without a second thought, Mike descends the stairs, peels off his sweater, and hands it to her.

El gingerly takes it, cheeks pink. "Thank you."

He bites his lip. "Something wrong?"

"Nothing," El replies, a little too quick, voice too high. She slips the dark green garment over her head. "I guess chivalry isn't dead."

"Who said it was?"

“Joyce made that joke the other day, at dinner,” El flicks the dryer on, shrugging. “I didn’t know what the word meant, though, so I looked it up. I hate laughing at things two hours after someone says something funny.”

Mike takes her hand. “Wanna hear a stupid joke?”

El gives him an exasperated look. “I guess.”

“Knock knock.”

She rolls her eyes. “Who’s there?”

Mike kisses her. He doesn’t waste another second, pulling her a little closer and cupping her face with one hand, letting the other tangle in her rain-washed curls. El makes a surprised gasping sound before melting against him, lips moving, tasting faintly of strawberries.

It’s perfect. Everything with her is perfect.

He pulls back. “Hi.”

El brushes her nose against his. “That joke didn’t make sense.”

“I said it was stupid,” he points out, pressing light kisses to her cheeks and forehead, smiling like an idiot.

She wraps her arms around his waist, tracing the line of his spine, sending shivers down his back. “You smell good.”

He hums. “You smell like wet dog.”

“I *don’t*!”

“You’re right,” he grins, dodging the blow. “You smell like lemons.”

“Lemons,” she nods. “That’s my shampoo.”

He kisses the top of her head, breathing in the faint scent. It makes his knees a little weak.

Then thunder claps, and El practically jumps out of his arms. Mike feels her warmth dissipate almost immediately, and he’s suddenly

aware that he's only wearing a thin white shirt for a top.

"Come back," he gently tugs her closer again, burying his face in her neck. "What're you doing here anyway?"

"I missed you," El says. "Guess what?"

"What?"

"We met today. Two years ago."

Oh. When she says it, something in him shifts. It feels both an insufficient measure of time for how long he's known her, and equally mindblowing. Two years. 730 days.

"Is our anniversary today or a few days from now?"

El tilts her head to look up at him, head cocked with curiosity. "What do you mean?"

"We met two years ago," he explains, "but we didn't kiss until like, four days after."

"It's today," El says, pressing a light kiss against his jawline that makes his face heat up.

"Okay," he says. Then her lips are on his for real, again, and there's nothing else except this. Slow and soft and hesitant; she grabs his shirt to pull him down a little, on her toes anyway. *Shortstack.*

Buzz!

"Shit!" Mike rips away, almost biting his own lip.

El grins, glancing at the dryer. "Sweater's done."

"Uh-huh."

She looks amazing in this light; hair frizzed around her face in a halo, skin glowing gold, cheeks flushed.

"I like yours better."

They end up staying down in the basement. Mike brings his books and remaining homework, while El procures a few things to occupy herself with while he studies.

It doesn't take too long. He proofreads his essay, flies through his history homework, and gets halfway through his science when El starts scooting closer.

It's not so noticeable at first, but three pages later and she has his full attention.

"You're not subtle," he tells her, when she's inches from burrowing into his side.

El tosses her book aside with a groan. "Are you almost done?"

"Yeah," Mike laughs, "but you make it hard to think."

El's brow furrows. "I do?"

He reaches out and lightly tugs in one of her curls. "You're too pretty."

El rolls her eyes. "I'm not *that* pretty."

"Bull," Mike sets his book aside, knowing it won't take long to finish anyway, and gently pulls her toward him. El settles against his side. "You so are."

El looks up at him, studying his face. With anyone else, this much intensity would be a little unnerving. She reaches up and runs her fingers through his hair, making him feel oddly safe and secure. He rests his head against the couch cushion, still eyeing her from his half-tilted angle.

Her thumb brushes over his freckles. "You're the best thing that ever happened to me, Mike."

It's almost like she's coming to the conclusion right there in front of him, and she just says *it*; no hesitation, no reluctance, in that blunt way she's always had. "El..."

"I mean it," she pokes his cheek, the way she had the morning after they'd reunited, happily proclaiming that he was real.

He wants to tell her, then. He really, really does. He wants to say I love you. He knows he shouldn't, knows he can't (because what if it like, totally ruins everything and freaks her out?), but he wants to. More than anything.

Instead he settles for, "You're the best thing that ever happened to me, too."

It doesn't feel like enough. Those words don't encompass his heart and soul, she does. God, he's been having so many over-the-top thoughts lately...

El wraps her arms around him, draping her legs over his.

Mike watches her breathe, for a minute. He watches her face turn a little sleepy and serene. Then he pokes her side.

"Mike."

"You can't fall asleep on me," he says.

"You're comfy," she protests, holding him a little tighter.

Mike makes to move, trying to roll off the couch, but she pulls him right back into her arms and hooks her leg around his. "No."

"El."

"Stay with me. Forever."

"Oh, *just* forever?"

"Yeah," El kisses his neck, eyes still closed, before settling back on his shoulder. "Hop and Joyce are gonna be together forever."

"How do you know that?"

"He's buying her a ring," El says. "Saving up."

It's not the most surprising thing. Sure, it's a little soon—but then,

they've known each other like, their whole lives. They've fought side by side against interdimensional threats.

"Yeah?"

El nods. "He said I'll get to plan their wedding. It'll be good practise."

"For what?"

"For ours, dummy," she flicks his chest.

Mike can't stop the smile from spreading across his face. "Oh," he says, trying his hardest not to sound *noticeably* pleased. "Cool."

"Or," El sits up, "maybe we could do something different, like, run off to Vegas in the middle of the night."

"Vegas? Isn't that, like, tacky?"

"Not if it's with you," she shrugs.

Mike nudges her nose with his own. Their eyelids flutter closed and the move closer together, almost automatically. "Happy anniversary, Shortstack."

Her reply isn't exactly vocal, but it's good enough for him.

-four-

April, 1988

"Stringy?"

Her voice is tinny through the phone, but he can still tell it doesn't sound quite *right*; it immediately sets him on edge. Mike's hand falls from the tie he'd been attempting to fix. "El?"

"Who else?" she pauses, *coughs*, and then speaks again. "We can't go to prom."

"You're sick."

"Yeah," El sighs, sounding more and more congested. "I'm sorry,

Mike, I—”

“I’ll be there in ten minutes.”

When he gets there—tux already soaked through from the rain, hair plastered to his forehead, out of breath—she’s sitting on the edge of her bed.

She’s still wearing her prom dress.

Her hair is falling out of whatever style she’d attempted, and her face is devoid of any colour. Her eyes are puffy like she’s been crying, which immediately sets off his oh fuck alarm bells.

Mike sits down beside her, setting down the bag of stuff he’d brought, and takes her hand. “What’s up?”

“The sky,” she retorts, rolling her eyes. “I can’t even move, Mike.”

“Not even to lie down?”

She sniffs, staring at the wall, looking hopeless. “Maybe.”

“Want me to help you?”

El seems to debate this for a moment, before relenting. “Yeah, I guess so.”

She sounds like she might start crying, like, any second. Mike leans forward and presses a kiss to her cheek. *It’s okay, shortstack.*

“It’s not okay,” she says out loud, as he stands and gingerly helps her lay back. She visibly sinks into the mattress. “I totally ruined everything, Mike. We were supposed to have fun, and dance, and—”

“You didn’t ruin anything,” Mike pushes a stray curl from her eyes, fingers lingering on her cheek. “This isn’t your fault, El.”

“I’m sick.”

"I know," he smiles.

El snuffles again. "Do you still love me? Even though I'm all gross and snotty?"

It's like, the dumbest question ever, but it sounds genuine. Mike raises his eyebrows. "Of course I do."

El sighs. "I need aspirin."

He pulls some out of the bag, along with water bottles and tissues. "Hop here?"

"He went out with Joyce," El informs him, propping herself up to take the medicine. "They're taking advantage of our absence."

"So Will left?"

"With Mark," El nods. "They're not gonna dance, though. They're just gonna 'stand around and look cool.'"

"Ah." Mike settles beside her, undoing the buttons on his cuffs and rolling his sleeves up. "C'mere."

El settles against his chest. Mike wraps his arms around her, resting his chin on top of her head. They stay like that, almost falling asleep, until—

"I'm gonna vomit."

El makes it to the bathroom, thank god. Mike follows after, kneeling down beside her.

She's really crying, now—half delirious, feeling like shit. Mike runs his hand up and down her back, holding her hair away from her face with the other. "It's gonna be okay, Shortstack, I promise."

"No it won't," El sobs. "God, this is gross."

He flushes the toilet. "See? Gone."

"I'm gross."

"You're beautiful."

"Liar," she wipes her mouth and turns to him, mascara running down her cheeks. "Look at me."

Mike can't help but laugh. He doesn't really know why, but it bursts out of him. "I'm not lying."

"You are too," she says.

"D-2," he replies.

El smiles a little.

Then she leans forward and vomits again.

Mike reaches for something to tie her hair back with. He comes up with a scrunchie.

"Just let it out," he tells her.

"If I was holding it in I wouldn't be throwing up," she snaps.

Mike grins. He kisses the side of her neck. "Got me there, Shortstack."

You're so stupid.

Uh-huh.

I love you.

I know.

After a while, she stops heaving. They don't go back to her bed, though. They stay huddled up in the bathroom, her back against his chest, on the hard tile floor. Her pink silk dress fans out around them.

El plays with his fingers. "Thanks for the mouthwash."

"Anything I can do for m'lady."

She giggles. "God, stop, you sound like Dustin."

"Dustin didn't invent lowborn slang," Mike says.

"Yeah, but he uses it way too much."

Mike kisses her shoulder. "You feeling better?"

"Lots," she nods, "but you're probably gonna get sick now."

"I don't mind."

"I'll feel bad."

"Don't," he kisses her again, mindful of how warm her skin feels. "It happens."

El shifts, so that her side is against him, and meets his eyes. "Still pretty?"

Mike presses his lips to her forehead. "Really pretty."

-five-

November, 1988

He gets home one Friday night and they're fighting.

Mike is totally exhausted after his shift at the RadioShack. It's pretty late, his arms are sore from hauling so many boxes, *and* he has an English paper to write.

Needless to say, he's already irritated enough as he stumbles up the walk and unlocks the door, through which their voices are already audible. Mike peels off his raincoat and glares at the stairs.

They're on the second floor. It's fucking nine. Holly has fucking school tomorrow.

He's sort of hit his limit with all of this, really. It's not like it's about

him, or anything. The arguments are more about *absolutely anything at all*. ‘The thermostat is too high, the bill will go up, Karen.’ ‘I was watching that, don’t change the channel, Karen.’ ‘This food is cold, Karen.’

He finds any excuse to blow up at her. In return, she drinks and spends the whole day on the phone gossiping about anyone else.

He wonders why it all went to shit, and why they still keep up with this stupid image. Why don’t they just get divorced?

With these thoughts Mike trudges up the stairs, the same ones he once ran up as a kid, terrified and hurt. He’s never told anyone about that. Not even El, or Will. What would he say? It was over half a decade ago, anyway.

Holly’s door is closed, but the light is on. Mike glances at his parent’s bedroom. Their shadows are visible beneath the crack.

“I’m your wife! I’m supposed to be your priority, this *family* is supposed to be—”

“I have to take care of *this family*, Karen! I put a roof over your head, clothes on your back—”

“Don’t you think I know that?!”

Her door opens before he even knocks. His little sister stands in front of him, clad in thermal princess pajamas with tears glistening in her eyes. “Mikey?”

“Hey, kiddo,” Mike slips in. “You okay?”

Holly shrugs. “I can’t sleep.”

“Yeah, I figured.” Mike holds out his hand. “Wanna go someplace? Where’s your jacket?”

She points and he retrieves it, helping her get it on as quickly as possible. They go downstairs, careful not to make too much noise. Mike scrawls a note and leaves it on the fridge. He doesn’t care about the consequences, really. He just cares about getting Holly out.

So he does. They take the station wagon, which Mike'd been using anyway. He turns on the radio and she sings along to like, every song. She somehow knows all the lyrics, which she's apparently determined to teach him.

They pull up to the drive in about seven minutes. The porch light is on, casting a golden glow across the lawn. "Where are we?"

"This is where El lives," Mike says, slipping out of the car. He goes around and picks her up. "We're gonna have a sleepover."

That immediately perks her up. "A sleepover?!"

Mike knocks on the front door. "That's right."

It's Hopper who opens it. He raises an eyebrow, looking between Mike and Holly. "I don't remember placing an order for two miscreants."

"Can we come in? I know I didn't call, but—"

Hopper steps aside. "You don't have to ask, Mike."

He's still not used to Hop calling him by his first name, but he takes it. Mike sets Holly down, basking in the warmth of the house that envelopes him as soon as the door is shut. It smells like chocolate chip cookies.

"Everything okay?"

"Uh, yeah," Mike glances at Holly. "Is it okay if we—"

"Couch is yours," Hopper claps him on the back. "Remember—"

"No funny business," Mike grins at the old rule. "I got it."

Hopper grins. "Want me to go get her?"

"No, that's cool. I've—uh, we can handle it."

"Ellie," is all Holly says, before dragging Mike in the direction of the stairs. It's like she has a compass attached to her, since she manages

to find El's room on the first try even though she's never been here before.

El is hunched over on her bed, sorting through notecards. Her radio is playing some *Metallica* song, which she quits humming along to in an instant.

"Mike?"

"Surprise," Mike nudges Holly a little.

El frowns, flicking the radio off with a snap of her fingers. "Is everything okay?"

"Well, um—"

"Mom and dad were fighting," Holly says, now scanning El's vanity, touching all the little glass bottles of perfume. "Super loud. Do you have Chanel? Mom says it's the best stuff."

El blushes. "No, I don't."

"I'm sorry for just showing up," Mike settles on the edge of her bed. "I just..."

"Hey, it's okay," El takes his hand and laces their fingers together. "I understand. Hop said you could stay?"

"Yeah," Mike nods.

"But you guys can't suck face," Holly adds, grinning. She climbs up onto El's bed. "Why do people do that, anyway? It's totally gross."

"It is," Mike agrees. "And you should never try it."

El whacks him lightly. "*Mike.*"

"What?! I'm not about to *encourage* her."

"This boy Brian wanted to be my boyfriend," Holly informs them, like it's absolutely no big deal. "I told him no."

El frowns. "Why?"

“Cooties,” Holly says. “Plus he *always* pulls my hair.”

“That means he likes you,” El says.

“But *why*? That’s so stupid.”

“You’re giving away all our secrets,” Mike says, reaching out to gently tug one of her curls. She giggles, and it makes his heart skip a beat.

Holly gags. “You guys are gross.”

“Not as gross as you and *Brian*,” Mike teases, grinning as she turns red. He grabs her around the waist and pulls her toward him, ignoring her squeals of protest. Mike blows a raspberry against her stomach, making her giggle even more. “*First comes love, then comes marriage, then comes the baby in the baby carriage—*”

“Seems like you guys skipped step two,” a voice comments. Will stands in the doorway, grinning. “You know, you’re definitely not one to talk.”

“Shut up,” El throws her nearest pillow at him. Will dodges it with ease.

“I’m just saying,” he raises his hands innocently. “So what are you guys doing here so late?”

“We thought we’d drop in for a cup of tea,” Holly throws out sarcastically. Mike’s never been more proud in his entire life.

“You two are definitely related,” El comments dryly. She leans over and kisses Mike’s cheek. “C’mon, Holly, lets get you sorted out.”

That leaves Mike alone with Will, who bites his lip. “Wanna talk?”

He shrugs. What’s to talk about, anyway? They fight. It sucks. Whatever. “Not really.”

“Well...” Will shifts. “You can sleep in my room, if you want. Well, I mean, I know it’s not what you *want*, but—”

Mike rolls his eyes. “Fuck off,” he says. “And thanks, Will.”

“Yeah, no problem.”

He’s left alone for a minute. Mike settles against the pillows, fiddling with a loose string on the hem of his sweater.

In two years, he’ll be out of the house. He’ll be away from the fighting, but he’ll also be away from her. The thought of leaving Holly here makes him sick, almost. If he could, he’d probably hide her in his suitcase and take her with him, wherever it is he ends up going. Wherever they end up going.

They’re gonna have a life together, and that’s *terrifying*. It’s terrifying because what if, one day, he ends up just like his father? What if he ends up dissatisfied and angry on the inside and spaced out?

What if he hurts her?

Mike doesn’t have time to contemplate it any further, because El is rushing in. She runs over to the bed and pounces on him, wrapping her arms around Mike’s neck and settling on his lap. “Hi.”

“Hey, shortstack.”

“Missed me?”

“It’s been five hours,” he says. *I always miss you.*

Then El kisses him, all open and raw and expectant. It makes all his worries sort of fade away. It’s just her lips moving against his, and the weight of her in his lap. El hums happily when he deepens the kiss, pulling her a little closer.

It’s heated and rushed, since they could be interrupted any second. Mike trails his lips down her neck. She shivers, leaning against him a little more, gripping the back of his neck. *God.*

“Mike...”

Her hands are under his shirt, trailing up his spine. Mike doesn’t hesitate before lowering her onto her back and hovering over her.

“What was that?”

“Shut up,” she grins. Mike kisses her cheek, right over her dimple. Then the other side. “You’re such a dweeb.”

“But you love me, right?”

“Yeah,” she pushes his hair out of his eyes. It feels amazing. “I do.”

“Wanna go steady?”

“Mike!”

He’s already kissing her jaw, steadily moving to her earlobe. “I’m serious,” he says. “We can like, hold hands, and you can be my gal.”

“You know, in the movies,” her voice has gone totally breathless, success, “it’s always older couples who joke about this stuff.”

“Three years doesn’t count?”

El tilts her head to give him better access, sighing when he obliges. “Check with me again in twenty.”

Twenty. “Okay.”

“I can’t believe you called me ‘gal’ by the way,” El meets his eyes, cheeks flushed and pupils blown, lips already a little swollen.

Mike grins. “What do you prefer?”

“Absolutely anything else.”

Now it’s his turn to fall apart. El noses down the collar of his shirt and presses her lips against the exposed skin, sucking hard enough to leave a mark. “Yeah?” He breathes. “So, like, baby cakes?”

El draws back. “Mike.”

“Sugar pie? Honey bunch? Pudding?”

El giggles. “Just stick with shortstack.”

Good enough for him. Mike wastes no more time, already missing the feeling of her lips on his. They're soft and sweet, completely irresistible. Mike shifts over her, holding onto her ribcage. El's breath hitches when his hand travels just a touch higher—

“You two are *disgusting!*”

It's Will, with a hand over Holly's eyes. She's laughing maniacally, trying to squirm away and see.

Mike rolls off of El. “I hate this.”

El pecks his cheek. “Goodnight, Stringy.”

Mike catches her eye, feeling that pull in his stomach. He loves her so much, feels it everywhere. She's so beautiful. God, he's give anything to stay in this bed with her and just *sleep*.

“Goodnight, shortstack.”

Holly jumps up on the bed. “Get off, wasteoid.”

“I found you a sleeping bag,” Will says. “But I'll take it away if I ever have to witness you defiling my sister ever again.”

“Oh, no, not the *sleeping bag!*”

Will flips him the bird. Mike returns the sentiment. He gives the room a last glance, watching El lift the covers so Holly can crawl under them. She curls against El's side, easily and contentedly.

Love you, Shorty.

Go to bed, dweeb.

He'll never hurt her.

-at last-

“So...”

They're leaning up against his car, listening to some old song from the fifties play softly. Mike turns his attention away from the empty

streets, focusing on her, instead.

Her straw is inches from her lips. She's smiling, head cocked, eyes bright.

"Yeah?"

"So, we're married."

It's the first time they've said it out loud. Granted, it's only been like half an hour since they'd left the courthouse—after which they'd probably stopped at some run down fast food joint. Nonetheless, it makes his stomach flip. They're married. She's his wife. *Wow.*

"We are," he nods. "How's it feel?"

"It's terrifying," she grins. "But... good."

"Yeah?"

"Really good," El wraps her arms around his waist, leaning into him. "Kind of awesome."

"Tubular?"

She whacks him. "Dork."

"That's me, Mr. Dork," he says. "I guess that makes you Mrs. Dork?"

"Hey, I kept my last name," El reminds him. "But whatever helps you sleep at night."

He smiles, wrapping his arm around her. "Guess what?"

"What?"

"I love you."

"I love you, too," El leans up and kisses his cheek, soft and familiar. "But we should probably get back."

"What? No. It's only been like two hours—"

“We said we were getting *coffee*, Mike—”

“Twenty more minutes,” he pulls her back in when she steps away, “that’s totally enough time for a quickie—”

“I can’t believe I married you.”

He grins, all stupid, cheeks hurting. “Yeah.”

“You’re so stupid.”

“I’m your husband,” Mike kisses her forehead, “I’m *supposed* to be stupid.”

He doesn’t miss the way her cheeks flush, the way her eyes spark.
Husband. Wife. Married.

“Alright,” El nods. “Twenty minutes.”

Only, they don’t make it twenty minutes before it starts to rain. Mike ignores it, pretends like it’s not happening—it’s insignificant; instead, he dips her, laughing at her protests, and kisses her.

Fucking finally.

Author’s Note:

Okay, I’m not gonna lie, I literally hate this. I tried writing it like 5 times (literally, I probably wrote like 30k trying to get this down) before I finally just thought “well, I can’t do it anymore” and this was the result. I’m so sorry it sucks, guys. I tried as hard as I could to make it... how I imagined it, y’know, and I ended up with this, and I’m just not satisfied at all with it.

anyway, yell at me on tumblr: @mad-maxxy

Yay, they’re married!!!

Also, I’m dedicating this to Hannah because she’s the Wolf to my Hard, the Stranger to my Things, the

Meme to my Finn. Love you, beeb <3

Oh, and this is El's prom dress, for anyone wondering:

<https://www.colorfullyshop.com/champagne-prom-dresses-short-prom-dresses-short-sleeve-homecoming-dresses-pleated-prom-dresses-knee-length-homecoming-dresses-wf02g46-132.html>

Thank you so much for reading!!